

EVENTS

Crafting experiences to remember

How conference company C2 is disrupting the world of events

Braindates? Imaginariums? Networking 30 feet in the air? Welcome to the experience economy.

Anyone interesting in running truly innovative events needs to know about C2, the event company that is taking the conference world by storm.

C2 began in Montreal as a one-of-a-kind coming-together of the creative and business elite of the world. The event is the brainchild of Daniel Lamarre, President and CEO of Cirque du Soleil. Picture ‘business-meets-circus’, and you’ll get a good picture of what this conference offers.

With Cirque du Soleil as a founding partner in the event, you just know things will be done differently. C2 is famous for hoisting teams executives wearing rope harnesses into the air for networking sessions, and creating installations that smell as beautiful as they look. C2 claims that one in four people who have attended C2 have created business deals as a direct result of the event.

“They [C2] choose speakers who have taken an idea and flipped it on its head to achieve positive change.”

- C2 publicist Karen Eck, of eckfactor.

Billed by some as the world’s most innovative business conference, C2 is coming to Melbourne in October. The event will offer Australian associations the chance to sample the this fresh thinking and have it inform their own.

You might not have the budget to replicate an event like this yourself, but you will be inspired by the ethos and create something for your association members.

Location: From car park to creative playground

C2 chooses site locations carefully and prefers the quirky to the convenient. A car park in Melbourne’s North Wharf precinct has been announced as the unique setting for C2’s upcoming Melbourne event.

C2 will transform the heritage listed No.5 Goods Shed, situated on the Yarra River opposite Melbourne’s popular

South Wharf precinct, into a creative playground for the two day event. This may sound easy, but try fitting a purpose-built Ferris wheel into your next location. But more on that later.

Networking: Curated one-on-ones or ‘Braindates’

Networking at a big conference is a bit like speed-dating with business cards, so C2’s head of operations, Martin Enault asked the question: Why not apply some modern dating tech to improve the process and use algorithms to match conference participants?

“The problem we are trying to solve is finding the right people at the event in a sea of people,” says Enault, noting that many people attending conferences try to simply pass out as many business cards as possible in the hope of making a connection.

How does the new process work? Participants fill in a survey about their professional and personal attributes, and an algorithm pairs them for ‘dates’. Attendees at the conference also get the chance to rate the dates they’ve had. And it gets better.

Once paired, the participants hop on a Ferris wheel at the event to conduct their ‘date’. This helps “to cement the connection”, Enault says, and provides a novel backstory for how a relationship was struck.

The speakers: From spaceship entrepreneurs to singers to storytellers

“They choose speakers who have taken an idea and flipped it on its head to achieve positive change,” says C2 publicist Karen Eck, of eckfactor.

Based on an overarching theme, C2 curates a list of exciting leaders to share their stories. Speakers range from startup venture superstars, to technological innovators to local luminaries.

What makes the event stand out is the blend and curation of the speakers. The C2 organisers show thought and consideration for what the event tries to do by bringing in speakers who truly have something to add, rather than just rotating the current speaker stars doing the circuit.

Events become experiences: from Imaginariums to installations

Imaginarium 'labs' are designed to take participants out of their usual frame of reference; it's brainstorming with a twist. Each lab experience is designed to represent a common business challenge – risk, uncertainty, talent acquisition – and also to challenge one's senses, including the senses of sight, smell, hearing and perceptions of height.

The result? New ideas forming from shifting perceptions.

Pulling it together

Event managers start out with strong intentions to put on a great event, only to see their passion, vision and energy disintegrate under budget constraints, time restrictions and short-term thinking from board members.

As a result, many events end up as a variation on the previous one, with a venue change and rebooted speaker line-up spruiked as its point of difference.

As many association event planners are realising, it's not enough to just hire a function room and ship in a few speakers. Digital natives and millennials are coming up through the ranks as both delegate and event manager, and they are no longer content with the status quo.

C2 is the disruptor of the conference industry and will set the standard for what conferences can be. What can you learn from them?

C2 Melbourne runs from 17–19 October. For more information, visit www.c2melbourne.com

KEY TAKEAWAYS

LOCATION – THINK PARTNERSHIPS

Who has a venue that would like coverage and media exposure? An airline hangar? A underground water tunnel? An island?

Don't exclude ideas simply because they might cost too much. Think big, ask what's in it for them to come on board and then ask! What's the worst that can happen?

TECHNOLOGY – THINK CHEAP

Once you've arrived at what the problem is, look to technology to help you solve it. You might not be able to afford a high-powered web company to solve it, but there are other options. For example, you can hire an app developer on fiverr.com or on freelancer.com at a much better price point. The trick is to define the problem first.

SPEAKERS – THINK LATERAL

It's tempting to get the speaker bureau to make their suggestions, but for the most part, they just rotate the speakers they know and love. Get out and about and immerse yourself in the worlds of sport, art, theatre, music and technology and see if you can cross-pollinate the storytellers from each industry and make them relevant to your association or conference theme.

EXPERIENCE IT – BE A PARTICIPANT

It's hard to imagine something if you've never done it, so try to attend as many events like C2 as you can. Try exploring the more avant-garde theatre and music events, too, as they are often on the cutting edge of trends and technology. The more you see and experience, the easier it will be to bring those ideas into your next event.

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